60p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

114

Alien cats in Britain
The Swiss woman's dream
More natural oddities
Ritual magic today
Queenie Nixon

Aus & NZ$1.75 SAR1.75 IR75p US$1.50

THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 10 Issue 114

Consultants to The Unexplained
Professor A. J. Ellison
Dr J. Allen Hynek
Brian Inglis
Colin Wilson

Editorial Director
Brian Innes
Editor
Peter Brookesmith
Deputy Editor
Lynn Picknett
Executive Editor
Lesley Riley
Sub Editors
Mitzi Bales
Chris Cooper
Jenny Dawson
Hildi Hawkins

Picture Researchers
Anne Horton
Paul Snelgrove
Frances Vargo
Editorial Manager
Clare Byatt
Art Editor
Stephen Westcott
Designer
Richard Burgess
Art Buyer
Jean Hardy
Production Co-ordinator
Nicky Bowden

Circulation Director
David Breed
Marketing Director
Michael Joyce

Contents

Swiss dream case
VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE 2261
A Swiss woman had a vivid dream of discovering her sister drowned – but events were to prove it more than a dream
Colin Godman and Lindsay St Claire

Natural oddities
SOMETHING IN THE AIR 2266
The Brocken spectre is a well-known, if eerie, natural phenomenon. Others are more difficult to explain . . .
Olivia MacDougall

Alien cats
BIG CATS, TALL STORIES? 2270
Pumas, lynxes and cheetahs are often reported roaming unchecked in Britain – but are hardly ever caught
Janet and Colin Bord

Queenie Nixon
FACES FROM THE PAST 2274
We describe the strange gifts of transfiguration medium Queenie Nixon, who 'becomes' her communicators
Janet Leng

Rituals of magic
METHOD IN THEIR MADNESS 2278
Almost anyone can invoke the gods, if he or she is single-minded enough – like the Nazis
Francis King

Picture acknowledgements
Cover: Photri; Queenie Nixon (inset); **2261–2262:** Colin Godman; **2263:** map by Ed Stuart; **2264–2265:** Colin Godman; **2266:** ZEFA; Mary Evans Picture Library (t); **2267:** Mary Evans Picture Library (t and c); **2268:** BBC Hulton Picture Library (t and cl); **2269:** Andrew Kerrigan; **2270:** Syndication International; **2270–2271:** Bruce Coleman/Leonard Lee Rue 111; **2271:** Syndication International; **2272:** Natural Science Photos/G. Kinns; **2272–2273:** Syndication International; **2273:** Fortean Picture Library; **2274:** Euan Wingfield; **2275:** Queenie Nixon (t); Brian Walkington (b); **2276–2277:** Queenie Nixon; **2278:** Popperfoto; **2278–2279:** Michael Holford; **2279:** Rex Features; **2280:** Rex Features (t); London Features International (b)

© 1982 Orbis Publishing Limited. Typesetting by Servis Filmsetting Limited. Reproduction by La Cromolito, Milan. Printed in Great Britain by Jarrold & Sons Ltd, Norwich

In next week's issue
'The end of the world is nigh'; in **End times** we look at the curious belief held by many cults that the year 2000 will be our last. Meanwhile the British public house continues to comfort the masses – among them, apparently, a high proportion of ghosts. In **Great hauntings** we tell the story of some of these gregarious spirits. Believers in lost continents cite the humble lemur as sole survivor of the catastrophe that destroyed Lemuria. In **Mu and Lemuria** we assess the likelihood that any such continent existed. And we tell the story of the famous **Edgar Cayce**. Sometimes known as 'the sleeping prophet', he diagnosed and prescribed for illnesses, and foresaw the future, while entranced. We continue the **Swiss dream case** with a disturbing account of the nightmare that followed the dream.
Place your order now!

The Unexplained U.K. 60p. I.R. 75p. Aus. & N.Z. $1.75. S.A. R1.75. U.S.A. $1.50.
How to obtain copies of The Unexplained Copies are obtained by placing a regular order at your newsagent, or by taking out a subscription.
Subscription Rates
For six months (26 issues) £17.60, for one year (52 issues) £35.20. Send your order and remittance to The Unexplained Subscriptions, Punch Subscription Services, Watling Street, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK2 2BW, being sure to state the number of the first issue required.
Back numbers
U.K. & Eire: Back Nos are obtainable at cover price from your newsagent or from The Unexplained Back Nos. Orbis Publishing Ltd, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT – post free.
Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Europe & Malta: Back Nos are available at cover price from your newsagent. In case of difficulty write to the address in your country given for binders. South African readers should add sales tax.
How to obtain binders for The Unexplained
U.K. and Eire: Send a cheque/postal order for £3.25 per binder (incl. p & p) payable to Orbis Publishing Ltd to: The Unexplained Binders, Orbis House, 22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT. Please state the volume numbers required.
Australia: Binders are available through your local newsagent. In case of difficulty write to The Unexplained Binders, Gordon and Gotch (Aus) Ltd, 114 William Street, PO Box 767G, Melbourne, Vic. 3001.
New Zealand: Binders are available through your local newsagent or from The Unexplained Binders, Gordon and Gotch (NZ) Ltd, PO Box, 1595, Wellington.
South Africa: Binders are available through your local newsagent or through any branch of Central News Agency. In case of difficulty write to The Unexplained Binders, Intermag, PO Box 57394, Springfield 2137.
Europe: Write with remittance of £4.00 per binder (including postage and packing) payable to Orbis Publishing Ltd, to The Unexplained Binders, Orbis Publishing Ltd, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT, England, being sure to state the volume number(s) required.
Malta: Binders are obtainable by ordering from your local newsagent price £3.25. In case of difficulty write to The Unexplained Binders, Miller (Malta) Ltd, PO Box 272, 18a Scots Street, Valletta.

NOTE: Binders and Back Numbers are obtainable subject to availability of stocks. Whilst every attempt is made to keep the price of issues and binders constant, the publishers reserve the right to increase the stated prices at any time when circumstances dictate. Binders depicted in this publication are those produced for the **U.K. market only** and may not necessarily be identical to binders produced for sale outside the U.K.

View from the bridge

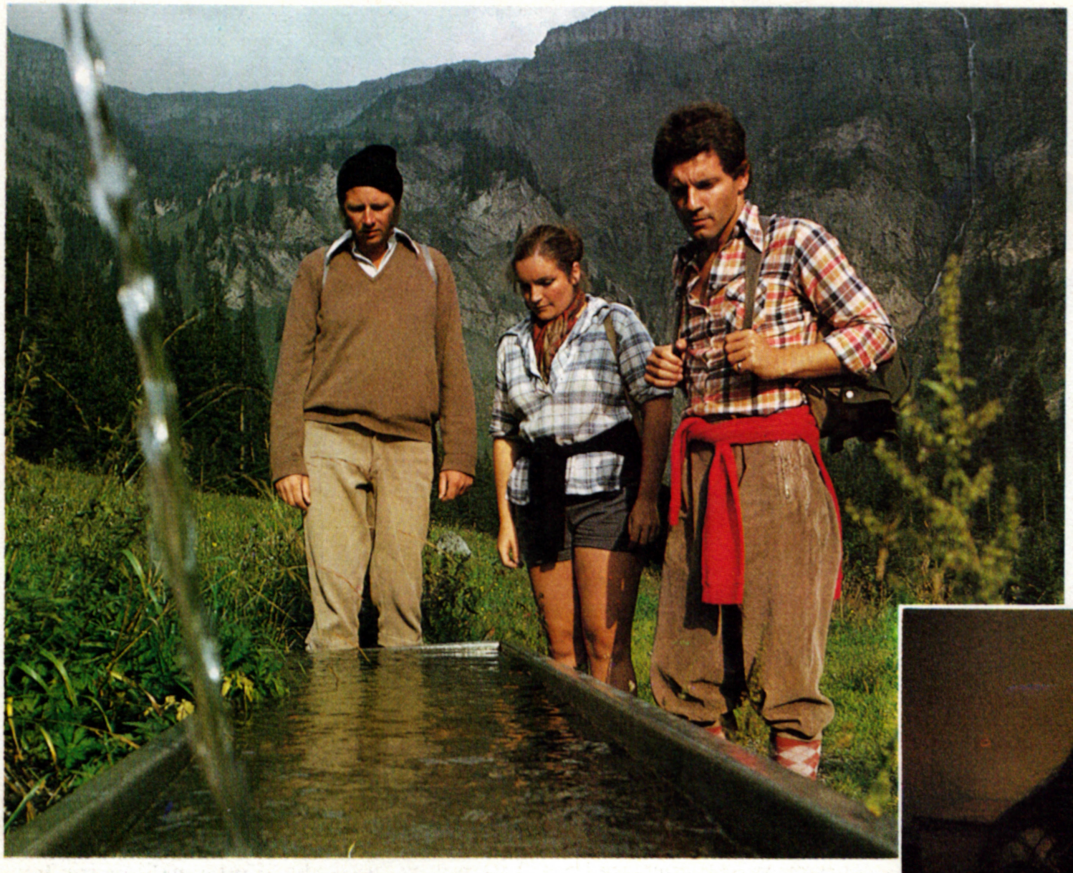
All of us have disturbing dreams from time to time, but Johanna Bravant's nightmare was to prove particularly harrowing. For, as COLIN GODMAN and LINDSAY ST CLAIRE explain, it turned out to be a premonition of death and disaster – which came true

THE AIR WAS HEAVY with the scent of flowers on the high mountain pasture, and the climbers, two sisters and their husbands, paused to rest. Below them lay the forests and valleys of the Bernese Oberland. Above them snowclad mountain peaks and glaciers shone with a dazzling glare.

One of the climbers, Johanna, was thirsty and eager to cool her hands in the sparkling water from the glacier. To her delight she saw a cattle trough at the edge of the meadow. Johanna hurried forward, leaving her companions, and with a sigh of pleasure plunged her hands into the water. Something was wrong. Johanna froze as she saw the water was strangely discoloured. She stared into the trough and what she saw made her withdraw her hands in horror. Under the water lay a body. Then Johanna made out a dress and the splayed legs of a woman, her pale flesh gleaming eerily in the dark trough.

Johanna Bravant woke in distress, her heart racing as she realised that she had been the victim of a nightmare. She did not know then how important her dream was to be, nor that, together with the events that followed, it was to form a classic case of paranormal research. On learning the details in 1973, Professor Hans Bender of Freiburg University concluded that it provided evidence of both precognitive dreaming and clairvoyant dowsing. The authors are indebted to Professor Bender for having drawn their attention to it.

Johanna was a country girl. She and her sisters came from a region 15 miles (25



Johanna Bravant's dream of walking in the Swiss Alps with her sister and their husbands was, in the light of subsequent events, a classic in the history of psychical research. Here (above and previous page), actors reconstruct parts of the dream in *Undercurrents*, a dramatised documentary for the BBC television series *A leap in the dark* (1977). Johanna is played by her daughter, Mercedes (right)

kilometres) south of Berne in Switzerland. They were brought up on a farm in the village of Guggisberg and their childhood in the 1930s was not very different from that of the heroine of Johanna Spyri's novel *Heidi*. Just as Heidi spent her childhood in the high pastures so Johanna and her sisters tended the goats in the same alpine landscape.

Twenty years later Johanna and her sister Mina found themselves in Basle: Johanna living over the 'Grüner Heinrich', the hotel and restaurant she ran with her husband René Bravant; and Mina living with her husband Bernard Segner, over a service station in Augst, 6 miles (10 kilometres) away. In 1960 Johanna and René decided to sell the restaurant and move to a new home at Vevey, on the shores of Lake Geneva. Recently the 'Grüner Heinrich' had proved very hard work, and this and other pressures were affecting the Bravants' marriage, so it seemed a good idea to make a fresh start elsewhere.

A week or so before they were due to leave, the Bravants had finished an unusually busy day. It was late in April, and the restaurant had been open until midnight. Two hours later, exhausted, Johanna went to bed. Within an hour or two the dream began.

As the details of the dream were to prove so significant, Johanna's words are used to describe it:

'I dreamed that my husband, my brother-in-law and my sister Mina and I were walking in the Alps with rucksacks on our backs. It was a very hot day, we were very thirsty and evening was approaching. Suddenly I saw a spring and a trough where the animals go to drink. I said, "Oh, at last – water" and I ran across to the spring to drink; but when I put my hands into . . . the trough I realised that the water was pinkish. I leaned to look closely into the water and I saw the body of a woman lying with her legs apart. She was wearing my dress. Not a dress I was wearing that day, we were wearing shorts, but a dress that I had at home.

'I was terribly afraid of the dirty water that I had been about to wash in, and of the body in the trough, so I caught the attention of the others. I said: "Something terrible has happened, perhaps a murder. We must go away. I'm afraid the murderer could be nearby and won't want an eyewitness." I told them that we would have to run, and at that moment I realised that my sister was no

longer with us. The three of us began to run. We ran and ran and ran.

'All at once I found myself in the middle of a bridge; a very long bridge spanning a wide river. I turned to see two other bridges, one to my left and one to my right. I was quite alone and I was afraid. I didn't know which way to turn, whether to run this way or that. At that moment I woke.'

Johanna put on the light. Her thoughts were in turmoil, and she paced her room anxiously. She felt she had to confide in someone but saw from her clock that it was 4 a.m. However she could not rest and eventually knocked on her husband's door. She blurted out that she had a horrible dream and wanted to tell someone. René comforted her, but told her that it was very late and she should try to sleep. Although very worried Johanna realised her story would have to wait until the morning.

The Bravants' Austrian head waiter Erik Kellner joined them for breakfast, and the men listened patiently as Johanna told her story. She said she had recognised the meadow as a slope of the Reckenberg, a favourite walk of the two sisters. She had not recognised the galvanised trough but said it was like any cattle trough used by the farmers of the region. What she had recognised was the detail of the dress worn by the dead woman. The pattern and the colour were unmistakably those of a dress Johanna knew to be hanging in her own wardrobe. Or so she thought. In fact the dress was one that she had given to her sister Mina some days earlier. When sorting through her wardrobe in preparation for moving she had chosen several articles of clothing to give to her sister. The dream dress had been among them.

Having told her story, Johanna tried to put the dream from her mind. There were more pressing things for her to deal with as there was little more than a week to go before their departure for Lake Geneva. Johanna's parting with Mina was heartbreaking. Her sister, although two years older, relied heavily on Johanna and seemed unwilling to cope on her own. Mina's husband Bernard was preoccupied with running his garage business and had little time to listen to Mina's problems. As a result her marriage, like Johanna's was rather unhappy, and the sisters had much to draw them together.

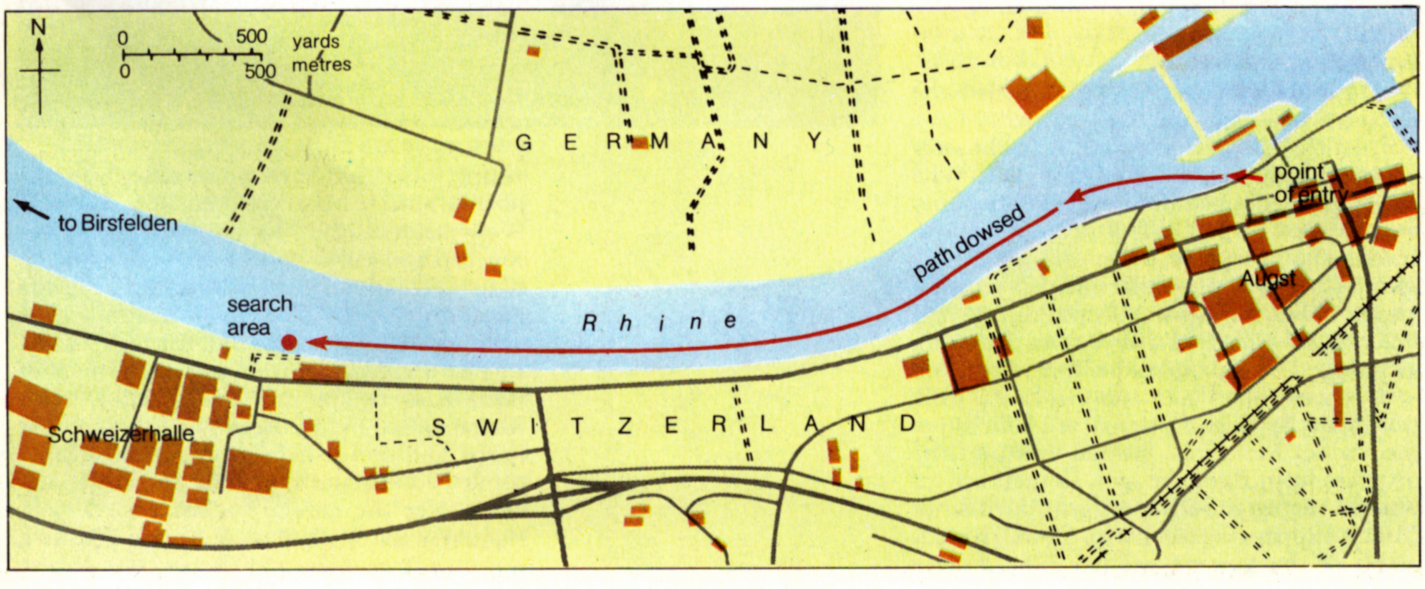
Johanna, however, was occupied with her move and settling into her new home at Vevey. On 20 May Bernard telephoned. Mina had gone out the night before but had not returned. If she was not with Johanna, he did not know where she could be. Johanna was worried and urged Bernard to tell the police, who could make a missing-persons appeal on the radio.

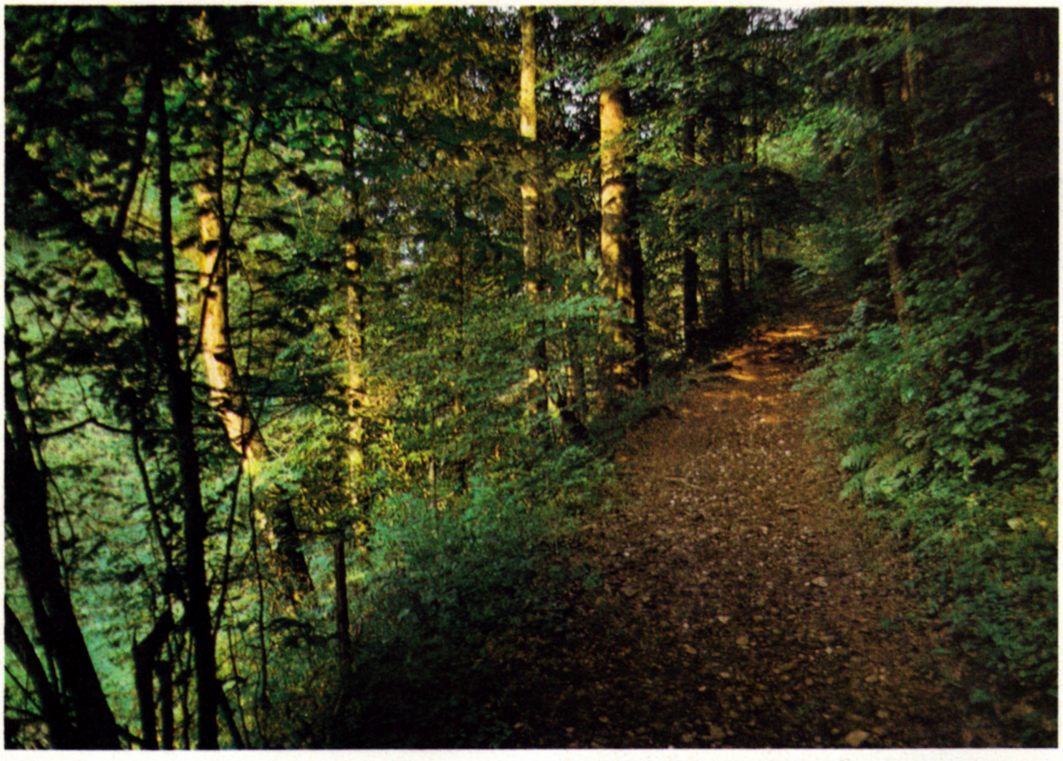
Childhood haunts

And there was reason to fear for her safety. Mina Segner had been depressed and confused and had been prescribed drugs. Johanna was afraid that she could have lost her memory and perhaps have wandered off. She determined to start a search of her own. She and René drove back to Basle, stopping at Guggisberg on the way in the hope that Mina might have been drawn back to her childhood haunts. There they found the old chalet where the girls had grown up and the forester's hut where they had played. Johanna roamed the forests calling for her missing sister, but there was no sign of her.

In the city it was clear that Bernard was reluctant to join in the search – in terms of his business, it could prove an expensive and time-consuming affair – so the Bravants continued by themselves. The police told them that, as there had been no response to the broadcast appeal, they were prepared to question people in Augst. Meanwhile, Johanna and René divided Basle into search areas and began a lengthy hunt on foot. After telephoning several friends to ask if they had seen Mina, Johanna combed the streets, parks and woods. The Rhine flows through the city, and suddenly Johanna found herself

A few weeks after her dream Johanna learned that her sister Mina was missing, that she had not been seen or heard of for three days. In desperation, she contacted a dowser named Edgar Devaux who, after swinging a pendulum over a photograph of Mina, declared: 'Your sister is dead. She is dead and she is in water.' Devaux then used the pendulum over a map of the Rhine near Mina's home and, with absolute certainty, told Johanna where her sister's body had entered the water, which way it had travelled – and where it could now be found





When a police broadcast on the radio, appealing for information about the missing woman, brought no response, the Bravants themselves began to look for Mina. Johanna had identified the mountain pasture in her dream as one of her sister's favourite haunts, and this prompted her to visit other places to which, she felt, Mina might have been drawn. But a search of the forest (left) near their childhood home, and of the forester's hut (below) that had once been their hideout, proved unsuccessful. It was when Johanna resumed the hunt in Basle that she found herself in exactly the scene portrayed in her dream

in the middle of one of its bridges. She stopped in her tracks. Exactly as in her dream she stood alone on a bridge between two bridges. It was frightening and uncanny and seemed to confirm the danger that Johanna feared Mina to be in.

The Bravants did not know what to do next. Then someone suggested they try the services of a dowser. They remembered an incident at the 'Grüner Heinrich' when the parents of two boys who had gone missing had begged Johanna for help. Regular customers had told the Bravants about a Monsieur Devaux who found missing people through dowsing. Broadcasts and police searches had failed to locate the boys, they recalled, but Devaux, using a map and pendulum, had been able to find them alive and well in Marseilles. The boys had run away to join the Foreign Legion.

Enter Edgar Devaux

On 23 May the Post Office informed the Bravants of Edgar Devaux's address. They learned that he was a retired schoolmaster living in Péry Reuchenette, near Biel. The Bravants telephoned him and explained that they needed help. Devaux invited them to send a photograph of Mina and something such as a ring or shoe that she had recently worn. These, he explained, would help him find her. Johanna said that she was desperate and begged Devaux to see her that afternoon.

A short time later the Bravants were welcomed by Edgar Devaux at his home in the rue des Malterres. He had dowsed their progress from Basle, he said, so their arrival was no surprise. Johanna gave him one of Mina's slippers together with a small photograph of the missing woman. The dowser swung his steel pendulum bob over the photograph. Almost immediately he said 'Your sister is dead.' Johanna, naturally, was shocked and asked how he could be sure. In reply Devaux made a few more spins of the pendulum over the photograph, then announced: 'She is dead and she is in water.'

The Bravants spread out their map of Basle and, before they could tell Devaux where Mina lived, the dowser pointed to Augst and said it had to be there. Johanna confirmed this and explained that the apartment over the garage backed onto a field leading to the swift-flowing Rhine. The map was on a large scale, and Devaux was able to

say, with confidence, that Mina had entered the water at a point near the maize field behind the garage. With the pendulum in one hand, he guided a metal pointer along the course of the Rhine. The Bravants were silent as they watched the pointer hesitantly trace the southern bank for a mile and a half (2.5 kilometres) west, towards Basle. Suddenly the pointer stopped, and Devaux announced, 'She is here.'

The dowser then used the pendulum over the map and seemed satisfied that this confirmed his findings: Mina, he said, was caught by roots or a bar of metal jutting out from the bank. He offered to keep the photograph and to dowse each morning and evening and report any developments. He felt the quick-moving water was bound to tug the body away from the obstruction and carry it the remaining two and a half miles (4 kilometres) to a barrier across the river at Birsfelden. The Swiss have harnessed the power of the Rhine at Basle by building a barrage housing four turbines that generate electricity for the area. Shipping is diverted through a lock, and a body in the water would be arrested at some point along the barrage.

Johanna and René Bravant explain their problem to Edgar Devaux (played by himself) in a scene from the television programme. Johanna was reassured by Devaux's belief in the power of dowsing and persuaded a team of divers to search the stretch of river where Devaux had said Mina's body would be found. However, after a fruitless morning she began to lose heart. Then one of the diver's surfaced, holding what appeared to be one of Mina's stockings

At times the power station has more water than it needs, so the river is allowed to spill straight over the barrage. The Bravants alerted Birsfelden to close the floodgates and keep watch for a corpse. Johanna and René returned to Augst to await developments. Day after day they telephoned Devaux, who reported no change: Mina was still held fast. The water level in the river was rising alarmingly: the snow was melting late and the spring of 1980 had brought much rain. Over a certain level the power station would be unable to stop debris going over the barrage. It was Devaux who reminded Johanna that it was nine days since Mina went missing: if she had been going to surface she would have done so by now. It was urgent, he said, that they find divers.

The police were reluctant to help. They had accepted Bernard Segner's view that his wife would return home when she was ready. Sending in divers would be a waste of time, they said: had Mina drowned she would have arrived at Birsfelden days ago. Fortunately René's friends gave him the name of Hans Engler, a professional diver who ran a sub-aqua club in Basle. René telephoned Engler, who was sympathetic but dubious when he heard his plea for help; nevertheless he agreed to present the Bravants' case to a club meeting that evening. It would be better, he said, if Johanna put the request herself.

The young divers listened patiently while Johanna told her story, but became rather sceptical when they heard that Devaux 'knew' Mina to be trapped near the bank at a place called Schweizerhalle. Although too polite to laugh in Johanna's face, they found it hard to believe that an elderly schoolmaster 40 miles (65 kilometres) away could know where the body was caught. Johanna emphasised that even if they thought her mad, she was still terribly worried about her sister and had to follow the most slender of leads. She said she trusted Devaux and found his confidence inspiring.

The divers were won over and agreed to meet on Sunday at Schweizerhalle, but on one condition: Edgar Devaux should supervise the search.

The hunt begins

The police were told about the plans. Although they had no reason to think Mina dead, they sent an officer to keep an eye on the group that assembled at 9 a.m. on 29 May. Devaux, Engler, the divers and the Bravants followed the fishermen's path that leads to the river. Mina's husband stayed at home, unwilling to be party to such folly. Apparently Devaux was the first on the scene to establish the search area – some 60 feet (20 metres) in length.

The Rhine was particularly murky that spring. The river carries much industrial waste and this, mixed with the melting snow, churned by countless strings of barges, made for very poor visibility. Engler said afterwards that it was like swimming in coffee, hardly seeing your hand in front of your face.

At 10 a.m. the first man entered the cold water. The team dived unsuccessfully all morning. After three hours they retired to the local café to eat and rest. At 3 p.m. the divers and onlookers returned to the search. At 4.30 p.m. a young diver was helped from the water, pale and shaking. While groping through the dark water he had touched something awful. In his hand he held a bedraggled stocking.

On page 2298: Mina's body is recovered – and Johanna's horrifying dream comes true

Something in the air

Gigantic shadowy figures that haunt mountain ranges, cities and armies that appear in the skies – surprisingly, these are perfectly natural phenomena. OLIVIA MACDOUGALL examines their scientific explanations

A CLIMBER is feeling his way along a precipice high on the Brocken, a 3747-foot (1142-metre) peak in the Harz Mountains of Germany, treacherous to all but the most experienced mountaineers. As he moves cautiously from foothold to precarious foothold, he suddenly sees an immense human figure loom out of the mist towards him. In his fright he loses his footing – and falls to his death.

This is the classic story of the Brocken spectre. Perhaps this particular version is no more than folklore, but it is undoubtedly true that the Brocken spectre does exist – and not only on the Brocken. A vivid example of the same phenomenon was reported to *Nature* magazine in 1880. It occurred on Clifton Down near the Avon gorge in south-west England. The time was around 10.30 a.m., and the gorge was filled with mist. The observer was standing on the top of the nearby Observatory Hill, when he was startled to observe 'a dim gigantic figure apparently standing out through the mist upon one of the lower slopes of Clifton Down'. He soon realised, however, that the figure was not as solid as it seemed: 'A moment's glance sufficed to show me that it was my own shadow on the mist, and as I waved my arms about the gaunt spectre followed every movement.'

The physical explanation of the Brocken spectre given by the anonymous observer is correct. Brocken spectres can be seen anywhere where shadows are cast on dense mist and water droplets. This is perhaps not surprising. But the drama with which these natural phenomena happen can make them startling, even frightening.

The observer noted a curious feature of the phenomenon: 'A gentleman who stood beside me likewise saw his spectre, but not mine, as we ascertained by the movements executed; nor could I see his, unless we stood so close together that the spectres seemed combined into one.'

It is not only human figures that cast these strange and dramatic shadows. Adam's Peak, a 7360-foot (2243-metre) mountain in Ceylon, regularly produces its own Brocken spectre. The mountain stands isolated, rising around 1000 feet (305 metres) above the ridge of which it is a part. The phenomenon for which the mountain is famous is that, just after sunrise, the shadow of the peak appears to rise in front of the observer, the summit surrounded by a rainbow-hued halo, and two dark streamers leading off into the sky. Suddenly, it either disappears or falls down to the ground.

This sunrise spectre mystified scientists for many years. It was assumed that it must

Above: a giant wraith-like figure stalks the mountainside, his head surrounded by a multi-coloured halo. Known as the Brocken spectre, this terrifying phenomenon is merely the shadow of a man cast onto thick cloud

Below: a desert mirage in Algeria. Such mirages are easily mistaken for the real object from which they stem

Below: the straits of Messina, the stretch of water that runs between Sicily and mainland Italy. It was here that a strange phenomenon was first recorded: on certain calm, sunny days, the image of a magnificent city, complete with palaces and castles, men and animals, appears in the sky above the straits. The phenomenon is named Fata Morgana after Morgan le Fay (left), the enchantress sister of King Arthur of Britain; local legend has it that the image is a reflection of her underwater city off the coast at Messina

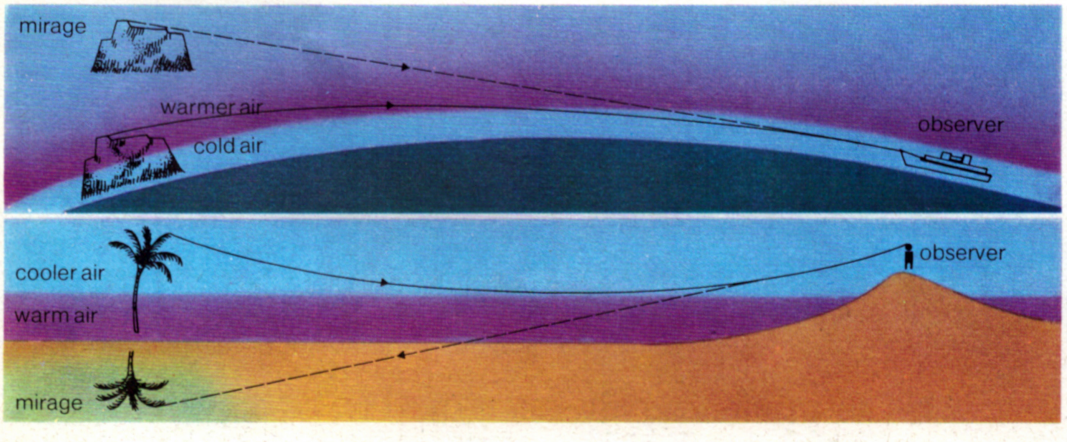
be some kind of mirage, but mirages are caused by a layer of unusually hot or cold air, and scientists could not measure any atmospheric temperature differences in this phenomenon. Then, in 1886, one Ralph Abercromby made the brave decision to spend the night on the dark mountainside and see what transpired at sunrise. He and his companions were evidently in low spirits by the time dawn came:

> The morning broke in a very unpromising manner. Heavy clouds lay all about, lightning flickered over a dark bank to the right of the rising Sun, and at frequent intervals masses of light vapour blew up from the valley and enveloped the summit in their mist.

Then, at around 6.30 a.m., the Sun appeared briefly from behind clouds, and the observers saw the weird shadow of the mountain. It disappeared and appeared again – and 'seemed to rise up and stand in front of us in the air, with rainbow and spectral arms, and then to fall down suddenly to the earth'. This was the feature of the phenomenon that had mystified scientists for so long – but for Abercromby 'the cause of the whole was obvious.' From his vantage point, he could see what had eluded observers on the ground: 'As a mass of vapour drove across the shadow, the condensed particles caught the shadow . . . . As the vapour blew past, the shadow fell to its natural level – the surface of the Earth.' He added that – as a good scientist – he had conducted a number of temperature measurements, and the results were enough to confirm his idea that the phenomenon could not have been due to a mirage.

Mirage, however, *is* the explanation of another extraordinary natural oddity – the Fata Morgana. This often impressive phenomenon takes its name from Morgan le Fay, King Arthur's enchantress sister, who could make cities or ports appear anywhere on the open seas – a talent that she appaently found useful in luring sailors to a watery death. Strictly speaking, the Fata Morgana is the name of one particular manifestation of this phenomenon – a magnificent city that appears over the Straits of Messina, between Italy and the island of Sicily. As a Dominican friar, Antonio Minasi, described it in 1773:

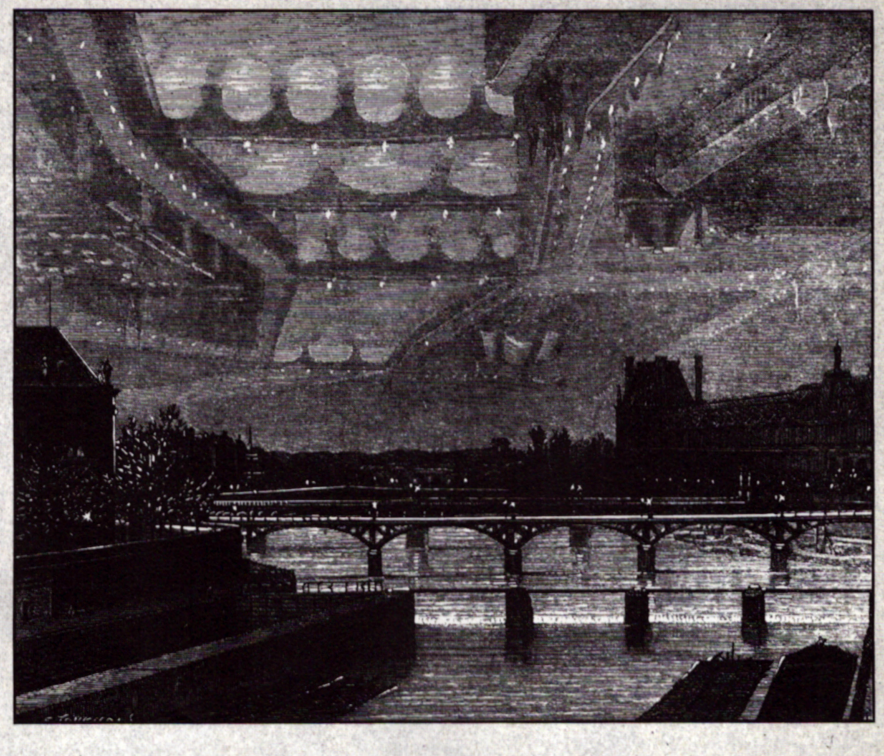
> When the rising sun shines from that point whence its incident ray forms an angle of about 45 degrees on the sea of Reggio, and the bright surface of the water is not disturbed either by the wind or the current, the spectator . . . with his back to the sun and his face to the sea – on a sudden he sees appear in the water . . . various multiplied objects, such as numberless series of pilasters, arches, castles well delineated,



Left: how mirages are formed. Differences in temperature between layers of air cause differences in density, and these in turn cause the light rays to travel in curved paths. The light rays reach the eye as if they have travelled in straight lines – and so the mirage appears above or below the true image

> regular columns, lofty towers, superb palaces with balconies and windows, extended alleys of trees, delightful plains with herds and flocks, armies of men on foot and horseback, and many other strange figures, all in their natural colours and proper action . . . if the air be slightly hazy and opaque . . . then the objects will appear . . . vividly coloured or fringed with red, green, blue and the other prismatic colours.

Minasi believed that the image was a direct reflection of the mainland coast in the water of the Straits of Messina; it appeared where it did, he explained, because the strong currents that exist in the straits caused the surface of the water to tilt slightly. Today, however, the phenomenon of mirage is much better understood: differences in temperature can cause patches of air to act as lenses, refracting light rays in unpredictable directions. This causes magnified images to appear with great clarity far away from the original object. The commonest example is the mirage of the sky seen in the hot air above a hot road. At sea, the phenomenon of mirages of ships or land, seen while either is still over the horizon, is familiar to sailors the world over.

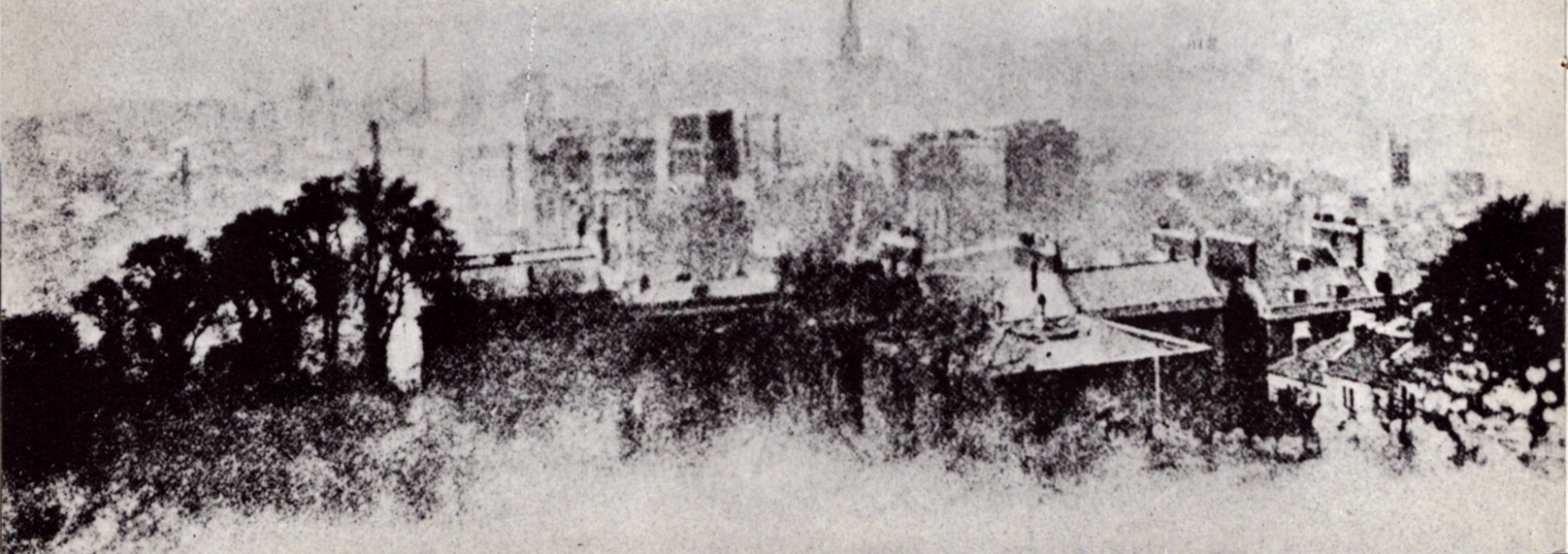


Above: 'The atmosphere' – an inverted mirage allegedly seen in Paris towards the end of the 19th century. Mirages of such extent and accuracy are rare

Left: an army in the sky, in a French engraving from the 16th century. Such scenes have been reported occurring *after* the events they depict; can they be mirages *in time*?

Below: a photograph, allegedly of the city of Bristol, England, that appeared in the sky over Alaska, 6000 miles (9500 kilometres) away, in 1887 – and annually afterwards

In some parts of the world, such mirages are a commonplace. For example, the mirage of Tallinn in Estonia, USSR, is regularly seen in Helsinki in Finland, 50 miles (80 kilometres) to the north across the Baltic Sea. And it is so distinct that individual buildings can be recognised. The sky above Alaska in North America is said to be strangely receptive to impressions of the city of Bristol, 6000 miles (9500 kilometres) away in England. In his book *New lands*, published in the 1920s, Charles Fort (see page 1721) mentions the tradition that Bristol is visible over Alaska between 21 June and 10 July every year – and notes that, remarkably, the image is said to have been seen regularly by the Alaskan Indians long before Europeans settled there and identified the city of the mirage. In 1887



You take the low road...

The force of gravity is still only imperfectly understood. Scientists explain it as a force of attraction between masses, a force that varies according to the size of the masses and the distance between them. Mathematically formulated, this law has become the basis of a complex gravitational theory that allows the effects of the force of gravity to be calculated with minute accuracy. The *nature* of the force, however – the way in which it is transmitted – is still a mysterious process.

It is agreed among scientists that the force of gravity is not constant on the Earth's surface; it varies according to the alignments of the heavenly bodies. Alignments of the Sun and Moon, for example, are responsible for spring and neap tides. And there appear to be certain purely local variations that are not connected with the movements of the planets: the lines of prehistoric stones at Carnac in Brittany, France, mark subtle changes in the magnitude of the gravitational force.

These subtle changes in gravity are discernible only by sensitive instruments. But occasionally, gravitational anomalies can cause dramatic experiences.

The Electric Brae, or Croy Brae (left) is a gentle slope overlooking the south side of Culzean Bay near Ayr in the Strathclyde region of Scotland. Facing towards Ayr, the slope of the road that skirts the bay runs gently downwards – but switch off the engine and release the handbrake of your car, and you will find that it begins to run backwards.

Another example occurs in Belo Horizonte in Brazil. Peanuts Street is a narrow and unpretentious suburban street that runs slightly uphill for around a quarter of a mile (350 metres). But switch off your engine and release your handbrake, and your car will move, slowly but steadily, uphill.

In both cases, the reason for this strange phenomenon is thought to have something to do with magnetic forces induced by surrounding rocks that are rich in iron. But nobody really knows.

a certain Mr Willoughby took a photograph of the phenomenon, in which many of the buildings of Bristol could be clearly recognised – but many people protested that the likeness was so good that the photograph had to be of Bristol itself; it was too good a likeness to be a picture of the image in the skies over Alaska.

The mirage explanation seems reasonable enough for these static images. But what of cases involving action and movement? The following extraordinary example was reported in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* (newspaper) of 13 February 1854. On 22 January 1854, an extraordinary phenomenon was witnessed by the inhabitants of the village of Büderich, near Düsseldorf in what is now West Germany.

> Shortly before sunset, an army, of boundless extent, and consisting of infantry-cavalry, and an enormous number of wagons, was observed to proceed across the country in marching order. So distinctly seen were all these appearances, that even the flashing of the firelocks, and the colour of the cavalry uniform, which was white, could be distinguished. This whole array advanced in the direction of the wood of Schafhauser, and as the infantry neared the thicket, and the cavalry drew near, they were hid all at once, with the trees, in a thick smoke. Two houses, also, in flames, were seen with the same distinctness. At sunset the whole phenomenon vanished.

Such armies in the sky have been reported with reasonable regularity, and are often believed to be re-enactments of battles that have taken place in the past. The repeat performances, on four successive Saturday and Sunday nights in 1642, of the Civil War battle of Edgehill is a particularly well-known example (see page 496). It seems likely, however, that the Büderich case was a mirage of military manoeuvres that were taking place elsewhere.

In cases such as these, the normal and the paranormal come very close. Science can explain some, but not all, of these bizarre phenomena – and those that it can explain it generally explains only partially. Confronted by such extraordinary, and apparently entirely natural, phenomena – and seeing beyond them the yet more bizarre world of the paranormal – one suspects that the world is not only stranger than we imagine – it is, perhaps, stranger than we can conceive.

Further reading

William R. Corliss, *Handbook of unusual natural phenomena*, The Sourcebook Project (Glen Arm) 1977
John Michell, *Simulacra*, Thames and Hudson 1979
John Michell and Robert J.M. Rickard, *Phenomena: a book of wonders*, Thames and Hudson 1979

Big cats, tall stories?

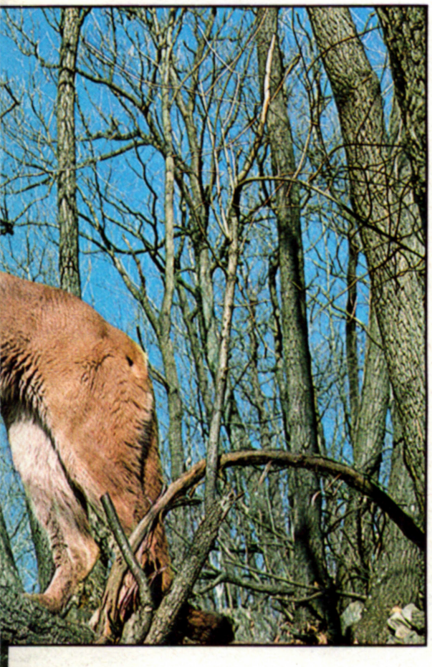
Have jungle cats found homes in the woods and forests of Britain? Innumerable reports suggest that, official zoology notwithstanding, frightening cat-like creatures are thriving in the countryside. JANET and COLIN BORD consider some of the most striking cases

THE LEAFY LANES of rural Britain are an unlikely habitat for the puma and no less so, one would suppose, for the lion. Yet both these creatures have apparently been seen, the puma especially frequently. Neither beast is native to any part of the British Isles; the only native feral member of the cat family is the wild cat, which still survives in remote areas of Scotland. But the wild cat looks something like a domestic tabby and is not big enough to be mistaken for a puma or lion.

Puma sightings go right back to the 18th century, when the traveller and essayist William Cobbett saw one in the grounds of the ruined Waverley Abbey near Farnham, Surrey, in southern England, when he was a boy. It was 'as big as a middle-sized spaniel dog' and it was in a hollow elm tree; Cobbett was beaten for insisting that he had seen this strange creature.

Surrey is densely populated in parts but still retains some quieter areas of wood and commons. It is there that the creature now known as the 'Surrey puma' has been most widely seen, with literally hundreds of sightings reported by apparently level-headed witnesses (see page 570). Since a puma has never been caught in England, the identification is really only a guess, and sometimes the animal seen is called a cheetah or a lynx. The sightings are scattered over such a large area and such a long period that many separate animals must be responsible for them. And there could be a variety of explanations, with large dogs fleetingly seen at night being the cause of some reports by witnesses who have heard of the 'puma'. But that explanation cannot account for the close daytime sightings, just as the well-worn explanations of pet pumas or escapes from a

Below: Shooters Hill, south-east London, on 18 July 1963: policemen, soldiers and citizens, including schoolboys, set off on a hunt for a 'cheetah' reported by a lorry driver and by police in a patrol car. The threat was taken so seriously that the searchers armed themselves – with pick-axe handles and hockey sticks



Top: motor-cycle police joined in the Shooters Hill hunt. Perhaps the authorities thought speed would be needed if their quarry should prove to be a cheetah – which can reach 60 miles per hour (95 km/h)

Above: most Britons would be hard pressed to identify a big cat such as this if they were to encounter it unexpectedly. Witnesses' reports are almost never precise enough to permit the species of a mystery cat to be determined. This is a North American puma (also known as a mountain lion or cougar)

zoo cannot possibly encompass all the reported sightings.

The elusive big cats are sometimes even seen by the people who are actively hunting them. One was the 'cheetah' that jumped over the bonnet of a police car in July 1963. This animal was first seen by a lorry driver, David Back, who stopped at Shooters Hill in south-east London to help what he thought was an injured dog lying by the roadside. The time was 1 a.m. Mr Back later reported: 'I walked over to it – and then it got up. I knew then it wasn't a dog. It had long legs and a long, pointed tail that curled up. It looked as if it had a mouthful of food. It ran off into the woods.' When a police patrol car went into the area, the 'cheetah' jumped over its bonnet – and the hunt was on. The policemen obviously thought that the animal was something more than a stray dog, because extra police were drafted into the area to search for it. In the end, 126 policemen with 21 dogs, plus 30 soldiers, ambulancemen and animal welfare officers combed 850 acres (340 hectares) of woods and open common. All they found was a set of large footprints in a muddy stream bed, and although the beast was seen later in the week and the reports were followed up by police searches, no cheetah was ever found.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s 'pumas' were seen in Surrey and also in other parts of England. The rural New Forest area of Hampshire seems to have been a favoured haunt. During September 1972 three young brothers saw what sounds suspiciously like a puma. Stuart Cron, aged 12, and his brothers Andrew, aged 10, and Donald, aged 6, were taking their dog for a walk when they saw a strange creature creeping through the grass on the forest edge. Andrew got closest to it, and later said: 'It was larger than an Alsatian dog but looked like a cat. It had a big head with stick-up ears, like cat's ears, and its eyes looked fierce.' It was tawny brown in colour. When Andrew slapped the dog's lead against his leg, the animal bounded off 'in big leaps'. The boys likewise ran off, and their Alsatian, which normally chased anything that moved, ran away with them. The boys' mother had earlier found large paw prints with claw marks in the area; this is not the first occasion on which such prints have been found around the time when unidentified big cats have been seen. The puzzle is that members of the big cat family (except cheetahs) do not walk with their claws out. So what are these animals? Are they cats, or dogs, or do they belong to neither family?

To report in full the hundreds of big cat sightings throughout Britain would fill many pages. We will concentrate on sightings from the late 1970s onwards, which are just as interesting as those of earlier decades.

Early in 1979 a *black* 'puma' was reported from the Faversham area of Kent in south-east England. Students of American big cat sightings will know that black pumas (sometimes called panthers) are often seen in the United States, despite supposedly being extremely rare. In Britain, they should be non-existent! However, farmer Chris Flood believed he saw one on this occasion; he said: 'At first people round here thought it was just a large domestic cat but it is far too big for that.' Paw prints found on the farm and elsewhere were identified by experts as those of a dog, but despite an official pronouncement that local people could stop worrying, Mr Flood and others who had seen the beast were not so easily satisfied. This confusion as to whether a mysterious animal is a cat or a dog often recurs. Are we, perhaps, dealing with some sort of hybrid?

'A cat the size of a pony'

Further black big cats were reported in southern England during 1979. Colin Carter was walking on the South Downs near Eastbourne in Sussex at the end of June when a black cat-like creature the size of a pony crossed his path and disappeared into the undergrowth. Early in September, John and Frances Clarke were walking in Tilgate Forest near Crawley in Sussex, 25 to 30 miles (40 to 48 kilometres) from the site of the previous sighting, when they spotted a large cat-like animal standing motionless about 75 to 100 yards (70 to 90 metres) away. It watched them for several seconds and then, when John whistled, it bounded into the undergrowth. The couple described it as 2 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet (60 to 75 centimetres) tall, with a small head, pointed ears, and a long tail. It was dark in colour, either dark brown or black.

Back in Surrey, puma-like creatures were still being seen as the 1980s dawned. On 27 June 1980 Mrs Vivien Wilkinson looked out of a window at her East Horsley home around 5 p.m. and saw a tawny cat at the bottom of her garden. As it loped across the lawn and through a gap in the fence, she saw that it had a thick tail that reached to the

Cats that are rumoured to inhabit the British Isles – and one that definitely does – are pictured here. The lynx (above) has distinctive tufts on its ears and the sides of its head. It is found in northern continental Europe, as well as North America. The wild cat (top right) clings to a precarious existence in some parts of Britain. In size and appearance it is much like the domestic tabby but is far fiercer. The cheetah (above right) is lean, rangy and dwells on open plains from Africa to India. If it exists in Britain, however, it can scarcely be living in open spaces

ground, and that it was somewhat taller than a red setter dog. There were other sightings in the county in 1980, too.

'Puma' sighting reports have not been confined to the south of England. During the second half of 1980, for example, there were numerous sightings of what may have been a puma in the Wolverhampton area of the West Midlands. It was first seen in July by a school teacher walking near a disused railway line, who watched it for nearly five minutes from a distance of 50 yards (45 metres). The brown animal had a round, cat-like head, pricked ears, short, thick legs, and a heavy tail held low. Following further reports, including one of an attack on a dog that was being walked by a child, the superintendent of Dudley Zoo, Mike Williams, visited the area, accompanied by his senior cat keeper. They were fortunate enough to see the animal, but could get no nearer than about 300 yards (270 metres). After following the animal for 15 minutes they lost it, and a police search of the area proved futile.

Mr Williams would not commit himself to a positive identification of the animal as a puma. He told the authors:

> Both Alan [the cat keeper] and myself were of the opinion that the animal we saw was much too large to be a fox, and had a lot of typical cat characteristics about it, but as we could not get close enough we could not give the police a positive identification. If it had been a large brown dog it would surely have been found during the police search.

He also said that he had no knowledge of an illegally kept puma having escaped, and presumably he would also have known of any puma that had escaped from a zoo.

A similar animal, possibly the same one, was seen again in the area in March 1981, walking along scaffolding and then jumping through an open window into a partly built house. It was described as about 4 feet (1.2 metres) long and dark brown, with a cat-like head and ears and a long tail.

Despite a vast area of remote, thinly populated land consisting of mountains,

Right: undeniably a puma, unquestionably loose in the English countryside – but Sheba, aged eight months, was a runaway from her owner, who had been keeping her in his garden. Tranquilliser darts eventually rendered her docile enough to be captured and taken to a zoo. This incident, which occurred in 1975, prompted the predictable newspaper headlines about 'safaris in darkest Hampshire' and 'great white hunters'

Right: a tunnel in straw allegedly made by an unknown animal, in a barn at Llangurig, Wales, in October 1980. Journalists and police laid siege to the barn overnight, but found no big cat inside it

Below: an unusual paw print found next to the barn; it was pronounced to be like that of a dog by experts. But big cat reports continued to come in from surrounding areas in the following weeks and months

moorlands and forests, Wales is the source of few big cat reports. It may be that some of the many sheep-killings there could be attributed to big cats, though they are usually blamed on dogs. However, in October 1980 the nation's attention was focused on Wales when a farmer at Llangurig in Powys reported that he thought he had a big cat holed up in his barn. Press, radio and television reporters gathered at the farm, together with armed police, but an all-night vigil ended without a sight of the animal. Police tactics were not subtle: according to a farmer, Michael Nash, 'they hammered hell out of the asbestos [side of the barn] when they heard it snoring.' But if there was an animal there, it must have crept out unnoticed to find a quieter nest. Later, however, a lair with wet straw and strange droppings was found.

The evidence for the animal's existence is enigmatic. Mr Nash had lost four sheep in 10 days, killed in a manner not typical of dogs. He had heard a snoring noise coming from the straw bales in the barn, and found large footprints in the muddy farmyard.

But all this evidence could be explained without needing the presence of a big cat. The sheep killings could have been the work of foxes or dogs; the snoring noise could have been owls, and the droppings (which were not kept for examination) owl pellets; the paw prints could have been made by a large dog. The authors saw and photographed one print Mr Nash had preserved. It measured 5 inches (12.7 centimetres) long by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches (7.6 centimetres) wide and was later pronounced dog-like by zoologists.

But this negative assessment of the evidence does not dispose of big cats in Powys. Only three weeks before the events at Llangurig, a district nurse saw what, from her description, sounded like a lynx near Church Stoke on the border with England, 30 miles (50 kilometres) north-east of Llangurig. A month after the Llangurig events, and only 6 miles (10 kilometres) away, another farmer described a strange cat-like animal that had moved in leaps and bounds across his fields. There were other sightings in that general area throughout the autumn months, but no positive identifications. In June 1981, sheep and lambs were killed near Aberystwyth and also on the moors only a few miles west of Llangurig. One farmer saw a black animal, about 30 inches (75 centimetres) tall at the head, and the police and RSPCA seemed almost certain it was a puma. They set traps baited with meat, but there were apparently no reports of a capture, nor of any further sightings. As always the cats, if cats they were, disappeared as suddenly as they had appeared.

Reports of lions are among the big cat sightings described on page 2306

Faces from the past

Transfiguration medium Queenie Nixon was brought up in the Spiritualist Church and attended seances from the age of eight. The first intimations of her psychic powers came in her teens, when she began to experience a feeling of floating in Spiritualist meetings. She prepares for a seance by prayer and concentration. Then she relaxes and goes into a deep trance; when she lifts her head, witnesses report, in place of her features 'you see a white cloud', which gradually moulds itself into a recognisable face

Mediums who actually take on the facial features of the sitters' loved ones are rare indeed, but Queenie Nixon, entranced, undergoes spectacular 'transfigurations'. JANET LENG describes this bizarre phenomenon

IN THE HALF LIGHT people gasp as the woman before them acquires the features and speaks with the voices of their loved ones long dead. But this is not a scene of terror from a Hollywood movie, and the reactions of the audience are those of joy and hope. For this is Queenie Nixon – one of the rare transfiguration mediums – at work. The public demonstrations that she has been giving since the 1950s may appear outwardly sensational, but underneath there is a story of devotion, purpose and selfless hard work.

Queenie Nixon was an only child whose father died 11 weeks before she was born. She was brought up in Kettering in Northamptonshire by two aunts who were dedicated Spiritualists and mediums. Consequently, she virtually lived at the local Spiritualist church. 'I've never known anything else,' she says. 'I always have been and always will be a Spiritualist.'

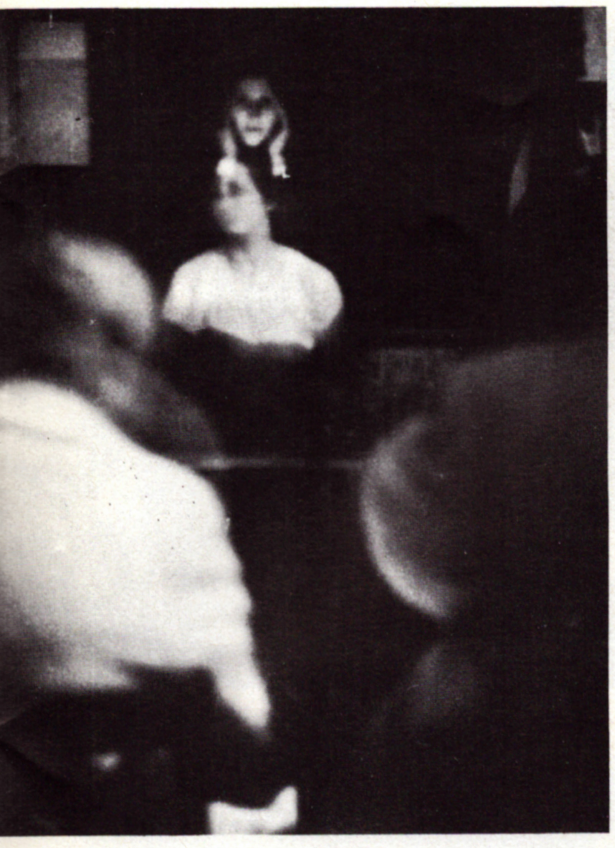
She joined the Spiritualist Sunday school, where the teaching made a lasting impression on her. By the age of eight Queenie was also sitting in on seances – 'just to be there'. This helped earn her the nickname of 'Spooks' at school. At the age of 14, while she was in the advanced group at the Sunday school, her psychic ability began to develop. Queenie already knew how much personal sacrifice and discipline would be required of her should she use her gifts as a medium, but she felt eager and willing to give what she could.

She describes how she became aware of her developing powers: 'I used to feel myself drifting away, and I could hear myself talking, saying things I hadn't even been thinking, and using philosophical expressions beyond my normal vocabulary.' This phenomenon continued, and her own voice became fainter when she 'drifted away', until sometimes she could not hear what she herself was saying. Then: 'One day I heard a change of intonation, and thought: "It can't be me. That's not *my* voice!" By now the spirit forces had perfected the procedure of withdrawing and returning me to my body.'

During this period she became aware of her spirit guides. One was Paul, a young aristocrat who had lived during the reign of George III and had died at the age of 29. The other was Sister Edith, a missionary from Dover in Kent, who also died young, at 28.

It was Paul who suggested that Queenie might have potential as a physical medium. But, at 19, although she was already leading services within the Spiritualist Church and steadily developing, she did not feel ready to undertake mediumistic work. In fact, Queenie Nixon did not form her first circle until she was 23, married and living in Blackpool. Within three weeks of the first sitting, discarnate voices began to take part in the seances. This phenomenon ceased as suddenly as it had started, and nothing further happened for some time.

The young medium spent the next few years bringing up her two children and



Sister Edith, one of Queenie Nixon's spirit guides, appears regularly in Queenie's seances. On this occasion the camera recorded Sister Edith (with her hands to her face and wearing the white cuffs of her religious order) in Queenie's physical body, and another figure in front of her. Said to be Queenie's spirit counterpart outside her body, this figure was not seen by the witnesses at the seance

helping her husband with the arduous work of running their horticultural nurseries just outside Chesterfield in Derbyshire. But she still found the time to work in the Spiritualist churches in the area. In about 1950 she felt she had put down roots at last, and she formed a new seance circle. The results were startling.

The sitters began to observe something like cigarette smoke swirling round Queenie's head. Next, there appeared white outlines of faces, like silhouettes, distinct but not solid. At one sitting several members independently observed eyes in these faces, which next came to resemble theatrical masks. They became ever more detailed and clear.

According to Queenie Nixon, the moment had arrived when the spirit guides had completed their experiments and had perfected a way to communicate through her. This method was transfiguration, or 'moulding', in which the medium's face and voice become like those of the dead communicator.

Since the 1950s Queenie Nixon's seances have become even more remarkable. But the medium herself can say little about them because she goes into such a deep trance that she cannot recall anything that may have happened. After preparing for her work through intense prayer and concentration, she relaxes when the seance starts and thinks: 'Here I am. Take me away.' And that is the last she knows till she awakes. When she is 'returned', there is a fog before her eyes and her vision is temporarily blurred. She can recollect what transpired only if there has been any disturbance, in which case she can feel very ill. 'It isn't easy for me to answer questions accurately,' she confides. 'I don't work consciously.'

Two Yorkshire residents, Pat Walkington of Huntington and Mary Staddon of York, have given a description of the Queenie Nixon transfiguration seance they attended in Harrogate in 1981. They entered a well-lit room and sat right at the front so as to have a clear view. The medium came into the room and was helped to put up a screen made of a black sheet suspended over a wire. (This, Queenie explains, is not to create an air of mystery but to reduce the possibility of illusion from the background.) Then, Pat Walkington recounts:

> They put a table on the rostrum in front of the screen, on which Mrs Nixon placed a small lamp with a red bulb which tilts up to illuminate her face. She put on a black blouse to cover her clothes and sat down a few feet above us on the platform. We were so close we could see nothing was rigged. The lights were extinguished and her light switched on simultaneously. It was not pitch dark and when my eyes had adjusted to the dim glow given by her lamp I could see the clock well enough to tell the time.

The voice of the spirit guide Paul gave an invocation and told the audience what would happen. It was explained that he did this because he felt the public were owed an explanation about transfiguration, and he

Mary Staddon and Pat Walkington (with glasses), who both attended one of Queenie's seances in 1981 and witnessed about 20 'mouldings', three of which were recognised by Mary Staddon as her father, grandmother and aunt

tried to make it as scientific as possible. To many, Paul's words are one of the most fascinating parts of the seance.

On this occasion a female spirit healer also spoke briefly after Paul. Then the medium's head dropped forward – and when she lifted it, she was transformed into the spirit guide Sister Edith. 'It was as if another person had changed places with her; but that was impossible,' Pat Walkington exclaimed. Sister Edith – who also appears between each set of transfigurations – took control of the proceedings. Using five or six pieces of information given by the communicator and the process of elimination, she found the correct recipient for the mouldings. The information may involve actual names, dates and facts about jobs, neighbours, pets. When she was satisfied that the right recipient had been found, Sister Edith asked, 'Are you ready to receive your mouldings?' At the answer 'Yes', the medium's head dropped again.

'When she lifts her head,' says Pat Walkington, 'you can see a white cloud and a triangular shape – nose, mouth and corners of eyes. Then as you watch you can see it moulded into a face.'

The transfiguration takes about eight seconds, and the audience is encouraged to talk at this point, but as the witness declares, 'At the same time you daren't take your eyes off her as it is so interesting.' There were about 20 mouldings on that evening in 1981, though it is said that double that number are often received.

Some recipients are too dumbfounded to react; but because response and recognition strengthen and clarify the mouldings, recipients are encouraged to talk to their communicator. The communicators usually say very little, but they seem to get much across through facial expressions and nods.

Above: three different transfiguration mouldings recorded on camera during seances. Of the mouldings she produces, Queenie Nixon comments: 'None of them resemble me, and it is just not possible for me to manipulate my own face to produce such a variety of size and shape and profile'

Right: taken by a professional photographer using a fast film, this moulding of a masculine face with a moustache was recognised by the photographer as one of his own dead relatives

Mary Staddon received the first contact of the evening with evidence that pointed unmistakably to her. She was given her father's name, religious background and birth date. She was also given her own birthday, the date of her mother's death and some details of her current personal circumstances. Then Sister Edith asked if she was ready to receive her moulding. Mary Staddon 'hoped beyond hope' for her mother, who had died in 1969. But when the moulding began, a long slim face with aquiline features formed. Her disappointment turned to excitement, however, as a pronounced widow's peak, a moustache and piercing eyes confirmed the presence of someone equally close to her. Later she

laughed about it, saying, 'It wasn't so much my father I was after, but trust him to get first in the queue!' The witness was reduced to tears but, mindful that she should keep talking to maintain the communication, she composed herself quickly. Mary Staddon has a strong voice, and she is convinced that this helped to achieve the clarity and long duration of her father's moulding.

When he gave her one of the long, slow winks she remembers from childhood, laughter spread through the hall. 'He told me to keep my pecker up – one of his old expressions.' As he faded, another face took form – 'the whole jowls and puffy round face of my Nan. She was a real Grandma. I saw her face, her earrings and her distinctive smile.'

Mary Staddon received yet a third moulding, that of an aunt she had lived with. Although the last two mouldings were more fleeting, less well defined and with less strength of voice, they were immediately recognisable to the witness. Having lost these three important people in her life in the space of less than a month, she felt specially happy and grateful for this 'reunion'.

Pat Walkington finished the account: 'We'd been warned not to be surprised by Mrs Nixon's appearance at the end of the seance. But we weren't prepared for the shock . . . . She looked tired, ill and green . . . and it took about 20 minutes for her to get back to normal.'

Once an hypnotist was asked in her presence if he could hypnotise the entire audience into thinking they were seeing what they were expected to see. 'Certainly I could,' he replied, 'but I could not hypnotise a camera.' He said this in the light of some remarkable photographic evidence. One set of pictures was taken at Batley Carr in West Yorkshire in September 1967 by D.M. Hosley, at that time a technician in the psychology department of the University of Leeds. He did so out of scientific interest. Another set was taken in the 1970s by a professional photographer from Bristol of his own communicators – his father, uncle and mother.

Queenie Nixon has willingly co-operated with psychical researchers and in 1982 she accepted an invitation to be investigated at Harvard University in the United States. She submits herself to such investigation even though she knows that she may be laying herself open to criticism and controversy. She finds it ironic that, although 'it is not wrong to have faith' in life after death, 'it is wrong to prove it'.

In spite of her wish to convince people of survival after death, she declines offers of television appearances. She says that publicity might give a distorted view of her work, and the results of her seances and services are of more importance to her than fame. Since the mid 1960s, requests for her help have multiplied and, despite ill health, she answers as many as she can. Her husband Clifford has always supported her and travels with her since his retirement – for she goes to the far corners of the world on her mission.

Her work takes a heavy toll, but to Queenie Nixon all that matters is 'to give people the conviction of the faith they're supposed to have – that this physical life isn't the beginning and end of everything – and thus help them understand their own personal responsibility.'

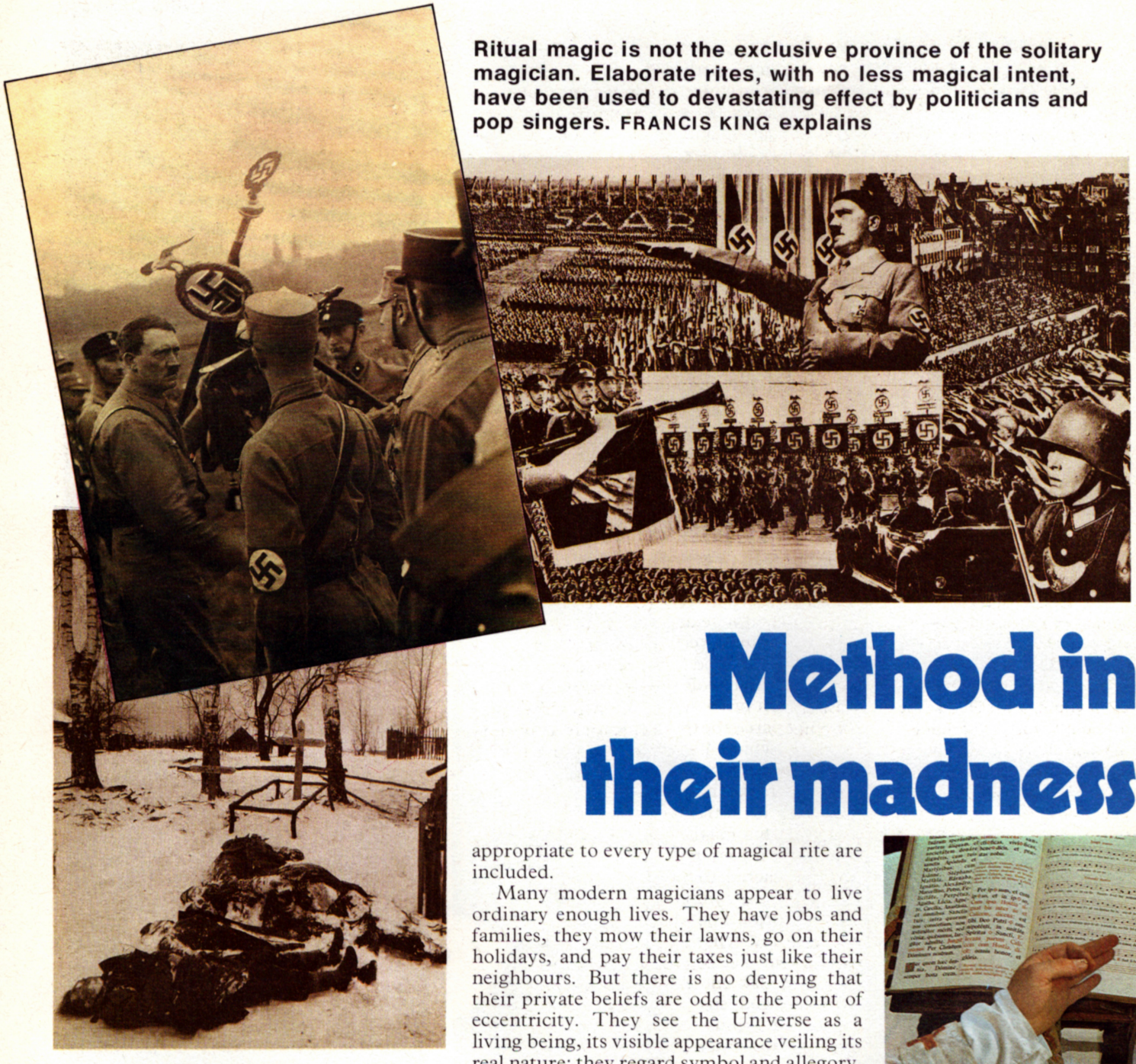
To the many thousands who have been given joy and a sense of new direction in their lives, it is all that matters too.

Below left: this photograph was taken just at the moment when one moulding was melting away and another building up. Queenie Nixon says of this: 'The mask which is disappearing to the left has obviously been a smaller and younger person'

Below: 'This shows a long, straight nose,' says Queenie Nixon, 'but my nose was broken as a child, and has a bump on the bridge and a slight tilt at the base'

Above right: this photograph is remarkable in that Queenie did not appear on the negative when the film was developed, even though she was sitting in her usual place in relation to the lamp when the picture was taken. The photograph is one of a series taken during a group seance, and is inexplicable to those who were present

Ritual magic is not the exclusive province of the solitary magician. Elaborate rites, with no less magical intent, have been used to devastating effect by politicians and pop singers. FRANCIS KING **explains**



Method in their madness

RITUAL MAGIC – defined by some of its contemporary devotees as 'the art of creating changes in consciousness in accordance with will' – is today practised in every great city of the Western world. A body of theory and practice that the confident mid-Victorian materialist regarded as a sad relic of the irrational past, doomed to be swept into the dustbin of history, has in fact survived and flourished. It is impossible to be sure just how many men and women regularly engage in ritual magic, but there is obviously a fair number, for several thriving businesses exist to supply their needs. In England, for example, the mail order firm of Sorcerer's Apprentice issues a catalogue containing details of a large selection of magical paraphernalia available to its customers – swords, daggers, ceremonial candles and incenses appropriate to every type of magical rite are included.

Many modern magicians appear to live ordinary enough lives. They have jobs and families, they mow their lawns, go on their holidays, and pay their taxes just like their neighbours. But there is no denying that their private beliefs are odd to the point of eccentricity. They see the Universe as a living being, its visible appearance veiling its real nature; they regard symbol and allegory, dream and vision as more truly conveying ultimate reality than all the equations of the mathematician and the astrophysicist.

Amid circles and symbols

The various physical and psychological techniques employed by magicians are quite as strange as the beliefs that inspire them. The modern magician will hold his body in painful and unlikely postures for long periods of time. He will spend weeks in the visualisation of, and the meditation upon, some simple coloured symbol – perhaps a red triangle or a yellow square. He will half-choke himself with the smoke of exotic incenses, he will whirl like a spinning top until he falls senseless to the ground, he will clad himself in strange robes and stand, amid circles and symbols, chanting the barbarous words of

Few political or military movements in modern times have used 'special effects' such as lights, music and stirring speech in order to manipulate the minds of the masses as successfully as the Nazis (left). In effect, they were using all the trappings of ritual magic to invoke the god Mars. No detail was overlooked; the 'blood banner' that had been carried by Hitler in the putsch of 1923 was used in every ceremony consecrating new swastika banners (far left). Yet this total concentration on blood and death was to backfire on them – their vision of martial glory ending in the snows of Stalingrad (below left) and the ruins of Berlin. Some dictators achieved a personal glamour through their ritual 'stage management'; Eva Peron even inspired the hit musical *Evita* (right, with Elaine Page in the title role). Yet many familiar rituals today have no such sinister purpose, such as the Catholic mass (below)

evocation that, so he believes, will bring the gods down to earth.

It has been suggested, however, that many others besides an occult minority have practised ritual magic in the 20th century. Politicians and clergymen, speakers at protest meetings and strike leaders, all, so it is argued, unconsciously employ magical techniques. They have learned from others, or have themselves developed on the basis of experience, the same methods of altering consciousness employed by modern magicians – but while the magician is usually concerned only with altering the state of consciousness of himself and/or a few close associates, the politician or the priest is intent on altering the feelings and actions of hundreds, thousands, or, in the case of such revolutionaries as Adolf Hitler and Eva Peron, millions of people.

A magical performance

Ritual magicians employ light, colour, sound and highly theatrical spectacle to achieve what some have called 'one-pointedness', in other words, the directing of one's mind towards one particular idea, one universal factor. If, for example, a contemporary magician wants to concentrate his consciousness upon, to flood his mind and spirit with, the ideal of benevolent power, he will 'invoke Jupiter'. In other words, he will either play the chief part or be the only actor in a 'mystery play' in which he identifies himself with Jupiter and surrounds himself with theatrical 'props' traditionally associated with that deity and his attributes.

Inside his magic circle he will outline a square or a four-pointed star – four is the number sacred to Jupiter – with chalks or paints of the 'Jupiterian colours'; that is, violet, purple and shades of blue. He will decorate his 'temple', the room in which he carries out his ceremonial workings, with sprays of oak and poplar leaves, associated with the god since classical times. In his censer, or incense burner, cedar wood and saffron, the 'perfumes of Jupiter', will smoulder on a bed of glowing charcoal. If he is one of that small minority of ritualists who employ mind-altering drugs, some opium will also have been placed in the censer or he will have smoked opium before beginning the operation.

The setting for the Jupiterian mystery play having been prepared, the magician will act out his role, identifying himself with the god in exactly the same way that a 'method' actor identifies himself with the character he is portraying. Every word the magician will say during his performance, every act he will carry out, every 'Name of Power' he chants, will be associated with the Jupiterian principle of benevolent power. By the end of the rite the magician's mind will – if he has been successful – be filled with that principle to the exclusion of all else.

Exactly the same system, that of using

ceremony to alter emotions and consciousness, is employed by politicians and statesmen. Take, for example, a May Day procession in any communist country. The fluttering red flags, the pictures of revolutionary heroes and martyrs borne aloft, the thousands of clenched fists and stamping feet, and the dais upon which stand the party leaders beneath vast romanticised portraits of Marx, Engels and Lenin – all are the political equivalents of the furnishings and decorations of the magician's temple. There is no doubt that the consciousness of the onlookers and participants in the revolutionary ceremony is changed. Their drab working lives, their inadequate housing and food, their fears for the future are all forgotten. Instead they feel themselves to be part of a great marching army, a rushing tide of progress destined, by the laws of history, to smash down all that stands in its way, to create a new and better world.

The great masters of this 'political ritual magic' were the leaders of the Nazi Party. Indeed, some occultists have gone so far as to suggest that Adolf Hitler and his closest associates had studied the techniques of occult ceremony and deliberately applied them to political purposes. There is no evidence of this, however, that will bear

Above: a May Day celebration in Moscow. The giant idealised portraits of the USSR's officially approved heroes and the preponderance of red in the banners serve to direct the minds of the participants towards a single goal: the furtherance of the Communist state

scrutiny, although at one period of his early life the future Führer undoubtedly read a great deal of occult literature. What does seen certain, however, is that the Nazi's Nuremberg Rallies were extremely formalised, elaborately staged ceremonies designed to exert a particular effect upon the minds both of the participants and of those who later saw films of the rallies – such as *Triumph of the will* – in their local cinemas.

The fanfares from assembled trumpeters in traditional costume or the theatrical black and silver uniforms of the SS, the stirring military marches played to the gathering crowds and the concerts of Wagner's music that usually preceded each rally, began to evoke into consciousness, *and to cause mental associations with*, the ideas of Germanic myth and tradition, military glory and National Socialism (Nazism). At the rally itself the massed swastika banners, black, white and red, traditionally a colour combination associated with war, terror and death, brought into the consciousness of the participants the entire Nazi ideology. The choregraphed precision of the movements of the brown- and black-shirted cohorts of the SA and the SS, all acting in unison as though controlled by some group-mind, evoked from the unconscious those archetypes of violence and strength that to the ancients symbolised the war gods Mars and Ares. The high point and prime ritual of the rallies – Hitler ceremonially consecrating new swastika banners by clasping them to the 'blood banner' that had been carried by him and others in the unsuccessful Munich putsch of 1923 – was the most potent element in the Nazis' loathsome 'mystery play'. The emotions conveyed by it were such that the minds of living Nazis were, in a sense, linked up with the thoughts and actions of dead National Socialist martyrs. This was almost a sacrament.

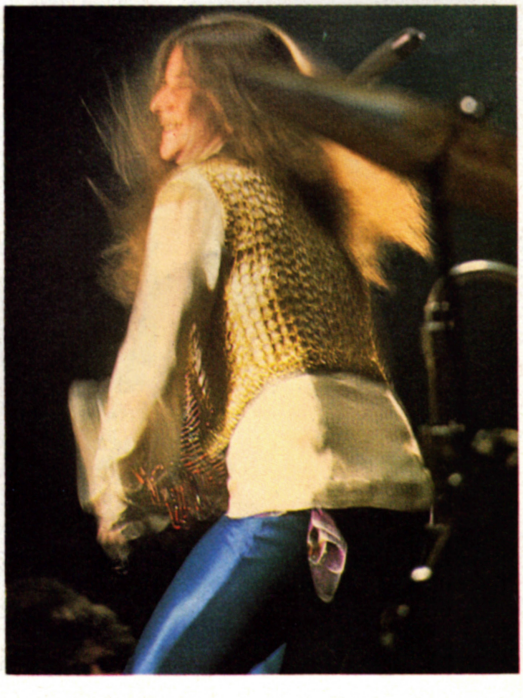
The magical and quasi-religious aspects of these rallies were emphasised by the fact that their climax always came after darkness had fallen and took place in what Albert Speer, the brilliant Nazi technocrat, described as 'a cathedral of light' – an open space surrounded by upright beams of light, reminiscent of the pillars of Gothic architecture, emanating from anti-aircraft searchlights pointed directly up towards the sky.

The Nuremburg Rallies achieved their intended effects. The overwhelming majority of those who either witnessed or participated in them found their minds overflowing with the ideas of glory, military struggle and self-sacrifice for the good of the (non-existent) Aryan race. If an occultist of great expertise had spent years in devising a ritual to 'invoke Mars' he would have been unlikely to have come up with anything more effective than the ceremonies employed at Nuremberg.

Destroyed by the gods

Some occultists claim that those who raise the old gods from the depths of the unconscious run the risk of being destroyed by them. Certainly many of the young men who invoked Mars at Nuremberg eventually fell as sacrifices to that dreaded god – at Stalingrad, at Kursk and in the fire and smoke of besieged Berlin.

At the present day no statesman or politician conducts, consciously or otherwise, 'magical' ceremonies either as impressive or as sinister as those performed at Nuremberg. But the same use of light, colour and sound to alter the thought and feelings of an audience can be discerned in other aspects of contemporary life, in religious celebrations, and even in rock concerts. Anyone who saw the late Janis Joplin in action witnessed a ritual evocation of the spirit of Venus quite as effective as any carried out by magicians, past or present.



Right: the late Janis Joplin, whose electric stage performances embodied – unknowingly perhaps – all the elements of an invocation of Venus

Further reading

Richard Cavendish, *The black arts*, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1967
Richard Cavendish, *History of magic*, Weidenfeld 1978
Francis King and Isobel Sutherland, *Rebirth of magic*, Corgi 1982
Israel Regardie, *Golden Dawn*, Aquarian Press 1980

continued from back cover

degree of fraud and fixing involved in achieving his results must have been prodigious. Ossowiecki indeed deserves fresh evaluation – not least, as Mary Rose Barrington pointed out, because he was a 'powerful physical medium' for many years.

So, of course, was Eusapia Palladino (see page 2241). Manfred Cassirer's urbane paper gave such endearing details of Palladino's eccentricity as cheating at croquet while the guest at Cambridge of the distinguished founders of the SPR and succeeding in the purchase of no less than 13 pairs of shoes at the expense of the unfortunate F.W.H. Myers. In due course she managed to produce her usual array of strange effects, unexplained ectoplasmic protruberances, and so on, all meticulously recorded. The peculiar thing was that these results were not fully reported. Cassirer suggested that Myers had been 'brain-washed' by Dr Richard Hodgson into believing Palladino had cheated, though how she could have done so remains 'one of the most puzzling chapters in the history of psychical research'. Not only that, but the SPR itself more or less forbade British researchers to investigate her further – an odd injunction from a society with no corporate views!

Paper into metal

If that episode leaves one perplexed, the purpose of the SPR's workshop on modern physical mediums was, in its way, no less puzzling. The workshops, it should be said, were themselves subject to some bizarre pronouncements: the oddest of which was that we, the media, were not to report them as part of the proceedings. Having said that, we can only tell you what happened at the one convened by W.G. Roll. We were treated to two accounts in particular that left the boggle-threshold in tattered ruins. According to one, there exists a Brazilian medium who, on a diet largely of whisky and salt (consumed by the large containerful), can turn the silver paper in your cigarette packet into a solid metal medallion, bend metal – not excluding the forks on other people's tables – and perform sundry other wonders, including healing. In the other, a Spanish 'medium' is apparently able to produce, at a distance and on request, psychic art by various deceased artists. This seems to be done by leaving blank paper to soak in water while the 'energies' gather. Perhaps the most gratifying result of these presentations was the sight afterwards of that admirable stalwart of the SPR Renée Haynes discomforting the carefully tended gravel of the Trinity College footpaths with her stick and crying 'Mountebanks!' Admittedly, the pictures ostensibly produced were, in some cases, rather pleasing to look at.

Rather better (and part of the official conference) was a film of an Israeli metal bender at work, which despite the usual grim quality of the 'proof', was dispassionately presented. Further reports should make intriguing reading, as the effects are by no means minor.

'Like-minded lunatics'

A major session was spent in tribute to the veteran psychical researcher K. J. Batcheldor, who has spent many years with 'sitter groups' in an attempt to build up a body of knowledge about how such groups can generate psychokinetic events. One of the more radical conclusions that he has come to as a result of this long experience is that a certain amount of controlled fakery can bring genuine results in its wake. Known to the *cognoscenti* as 'artefact induced' effects, they seem to come about as a result of relaxation on the part of the group once it believes that it is functioning properly. Intriguing though this is, the fact remains that not everyone is happy in such a group, no matter how eager they may be to see PK occur. Julian Isaacs remarked in characteristic style on the inherent gamble (and consequent lack of popularity among researchers) involved in sitter groups, which can leave an experimenter with nothing more to report than that he 'spent a number of pleasant evenings sitting singing in the dark with a number of like-minded lunatics'. And, by introducing so many variables – both of personality and conditions – the sitter group remains an awkward entity to control and to analyse. Especially (coming back to the experimenter effect again) when so much of its effectiveness as a channel for PK depends on the contribution of the experimenter.

In view of all that it was interesting to hear of the 'metal bending parties' held on two nights by a pair of American military gentlemen. Certainly their motives for arriving pretty well unannounced at this conference could reasonably be described as obscure. But they did produce results, with journalists, parapsychologists, 'sheep' and 'goats' managing in an atmosphere of levity and enthusiasm to ruin large amounts of cutlery; something for which initiates could feel due pride – and to which any objections could surely be due only to prejudice.

Pride and prejudice

For over a century the Society for Psychical Research has soldiered on in the hope of coming to grips with the whole range of psi phenomena. They have much to be proud of – but are the motives of investigators and researchers always beyond reproach? We continue our series of special reports from the centenary conference held in Cambridge

Much of what was on offer at Cambridge was good and worthy stuff: which can often be another way of saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. And, true to form, a good many of the papers we heard were of a technicality and turgidity wondrous to behold, and of an ultimate purpose that was difficult to determine. No less obscure in intention were a number of extraordinary claims made for 'psychics' – or physical mediums, perhaps – who seemed to have scarcely been investigated at all. It seems worth concentrating on these extremes because they illuminate some of the central problems of research into the paranormal and the paradoxes that seem to be at the heart of it.

Perhaps it was with a similar suspicion to our own that Dr Charles Tart once more enunciated his opinion of the 'syndrome of .05 significance': that is, the tendency of some, if not all, researchers into psi who use statistical methods to be really happy only if their results remain on the borderline of significance. The reason, he suggests, is that at that level the phenomenon is *safe*. It can be said to exist, but not at such a level or in such a way as to pose a threat to our sense of normality. And one wonders if the same people whose hair would curl if they were ever to produce a really startling experimental result are not also taking refuge in the production of elaborate machinery for generating random numbers and even more elaborate mathematics to help them deal with the answers they do get. And this is quite apart from the observation that, in real life, spontaneous psi does not occur to people trying to guess how many stitches Aunt Ada may have dropped in the next room. There can surely be nothing more boring than playing with a random number generator. There *must* surely be something more interesting for people to have their ESP tested on – but that, of course, might produce some of those vulgarly spectacular results.

Perhaps, though, this is ill-mannered carping on our part, and all that happens when researchers persistently come up with dull but respectable results (and write tedious but worthy papers to describe them) is that the experimenter effect is hard at work. Or call it the cosmic joker if you will, for if one looks at this conundrum with an objective eye it becomes horribly apparent that there can be no objective position in this argument – and none within an experiment either. A disbeliever will come up with results that either seem to deny the existence of psi, or are, to put it bluntly, trivial. And to the believer, even though the result is explicable to him, it is no help at all in establishing the conditions in which psi occurs or in discovering how it works. To the sceptic, on the other hand, all experiment is suspect when it attempts to come to grips with psi, and when it produces positive results the cause is either sloppy technique, gullibility or, at worst, outright fraud. There seems to be very little middle ground here, for even the willing disbeliever like Dr Susan Blackmore (see our first report in issue 110) will only produce results calculated to delight the sceptic.

Mediums and the mind

It was appropriate then that two papers at this centenary occasion should review the evidence concerning two very different but famous – not to say notorious – psychics. One was presented by Mary Rose Barrington on the mediumship of Stephan Ossowiecki (see page 68), the other, by Manfred Cassirer, on the paradoxical and occasionally hilarious physical medium Eusapia Palladino. Ossowiecki is important not only because his clairvoyance was so extraordinary but also because the likes of the American journal, the *Skeptical Enquirer* take special pleasure in decrying the investigative work done with him and accusing the experimenters of all kinds of fraud. Mary Rose Barrington suggested in fact that clairvoyance was perhaps not what Ossowiecki practised – rather, the evidence (and the way he himself described what went on in his mind) suggests contact with some form of *common* mind and not with a single 'sender'. It's worth saying too that the detail provided in this paper leads to one of two conclusions: that the man was indeed an extraordinary psychic, or that the

continued overleaf